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ABSTRACT

This brief fact sheet addresses the following concerns about effective communication and accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): requirements under the ADA for achieving effective communication (e.g., provision of necessary auxiliary communication aids and services); identification of necessary communication aids and services (e.g., expressed preference of the individual); strategies for achieving effective communication; examples of communication aids and services; examples of communication barriers; requirements for communication accessibility under the ADA; examples of readily achievable structural barrier removal strategies; signage and symbols of communication accessibility; discriminatory policies and practices which must be modified; and ways to ensure cost effective ADA compliance. (DB)

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ED 363 018

COMMUNICATION AND THE ADA
(Effective Communication and Accessibility)

What is EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION under ADA?

- **Taking steps to ensure** that people with communication disabilities
  - Have **access to goods, services, and facilities**
  - Are **not excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently** than other people
- **Making information accessible to and useable** by people with communication disabilities

What is required to achieve EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION under ADA?

- **Providing any necessary auxiliary communication aids and services**
  - Unless an undue burden or a fundamental change in the nature of the goods, services, facilities, etc. would result
  - Without a surcharge to the individual
- **Making aurally (via hearing) delivered information available** to persons with hearing and speech impairments (including alarms, nonverbal speech, and computer-generated speech)
- Personally prescribed devices such as hearing aids are **not** required.

How do you determine NECESSARY AUXILIARY COMMUNICATION AIDS AND SERVICES?

- Consideration of:
  - **Expressed preference of the individual with disability**
  - **Level and type of the communication exchange** (complexity, length, and importance of material). For example, interpreter services might not be necessary for a simple business transaction such as buying groceries, but they might be appropriate in lengthy or major transactions such as purchasing a car or provision of legal or medical services.
- **Selection of appropriate aids and services** from available technologies and services (low-tech as well as high-tech) based on facility resources and communication needs (individual's and type of material)

What are STRATEGIES for achieving EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

- **Establishing appropriate attitudes and behaviors:**
  - Assuming that persons with communication disabilities can express themselves if afforded the opportunity, respect, and the necessary assistance to do so
  - Consulting the person with the disability how best to communicate with him or her, and asking about the need for aids and services
  - Training staff to communicate more effectively
- **Modifying the communication setting**, for example, reducing noise levels. Improving the communication setting can also reduce the need for assistive devices in some cases.
- **Providing auxiliary aids and services**
- **Responding to auxiliary aids and services requests**
- **Providing materials in accessible formats** (e.g., written transcripts)
- **Keeping written materials simple and direct**
- **Providing visual as well as auditory information**
- **Providing a means for written exchange of information**
- **Informing public of available accommodations**
- **Maintaining devices in good working condition**
- **Consulting a professional** (audiologist, speech-language pathologist)

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What are examples of COMMUNICATION (SPEECH AND HEARING) AIDS AND SERVICES?

- **In assembly areas, meetings, conversations:**
  - Assistive listening devices and systems (ALDs), communication boards (word, symbol), qualified interpreters (oral, cued speech, sign language), real-time captioning, written communication exchange and transcripts, computer-assisted note taking, lighting on speaker's face, preferential seating for good listening and viewing position, electrical outlet near accessible seating, videotext displays
- **In telecommunications:**
  - Hearing aid compatible telephones, volume control telephone handsets, amplified telephone mouthpieces (for person with weak voice) (to amplify speech for a hard-of-hearing listener), telecommunication device for the deaf (TDD) or text telephone, facsimile machines (that use visual symbols), computer/modem, interactive computer software with videotext
  - TDD/telephone relay systems
- **In buildings:**
  - Alerting, signaling, warning, and announcement systems using amplified auditory signals, visual signals (flashing, strobe), vibrotactile (touch) devices, videotext displays
- **In prepared (non-live) materials:**
  - Written materials in alternate formats (e.g., symbols, pictures)
  - Aurally-delivered materials in alternate formats (e.g., captioned videotapes, written transcript, sign interpreter)
  - Notification of accessibility options (e.g., alternative formats)

What are COMMUNICATION BARRIERS?

- Factors that hinder or prevent information coming to and/or from a person
- **Visually-related barriers**
  - Inadequate or poor lighting/poor background that interferes with ability to speechread or see signing
  - Unreadable signage (too small, not in line of vision of people in wheelchairs or of short stature)
  - Lack of visual information (For example, not showing speaker's face)
  - Lack of signage and accessibility symbols
- **Acoustically-related barriers**
  - High noise levels
  - High reverberation levels
  - Lack of aurally-delivered information to supplement visual information (For example, not using amplified auditory as well as visual signals in emergency alarms, partitions that block sound between speaker and listener)
- **Attitudinal and prejudicial barriers**
- **Information complexity** (such as difficult reading level)

What is required for COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY under ADA?

- **Providing TDD and accessible telephone or alternative service**
  - When telephone service is regularly provided to customers/patients on more than just an incidental basis (e.g., hospitals, hotels)
  - When building entry requires aural or voice information exchange (e.g., closed circuit security telephone)

COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY under ADA continued

- **Providing means for two-way communication in emergency situations** (e.g., elevator emergency notification system) that does not require hearing or speech for communication exchange
- **Providing closed caption decoders**, upon request, in hospitals that provide televisions, and in places of lodging with televisions in five or more guest rooms
- **Removing structural communication barriers** in existing buildings when readily achievable (inexpensively and easily removed)
- **Providing alternative service** when barriers are not easily removed (For example, preferential seating area)
- **Following accessibility standards** for new construction/alterations (ADA Accessibility Guidelines, Uniform Federal Accessibility Standard)

What are some READILY ACHIEVABLE STRUCTURAL BARRIER REMOVAL STRATEGIES?

- **Installing sound buffers** to reduce noise and reverberation
- **Installing flashing alarm lights** in restrooms, any general usage areas, hallways, lobbies, and any other common usage areas
- **Integrating visual alarms** into facility alarm systems
- **Removing physical partitions** that block sound or visual information between employees and customers
- **Providing directional signage** with symbols to indicate available services

What is needed for SIGNAGE AND SYMBOLS OF COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY?

- **Symbols** for:
  - **Telephone** accessibility:
    - blue grommet between cord and handset—"hearing aid compatible"
    - telephone handset with radiating soundwaves—"volume control"
  - **TDDs** or text telephones—the international TDD symbol
- **Signage:**
  - **Directional signage** indicating nearest TDD or accessible telephone
  - **Messages for availability of Assistive Listening Devices** (ALDs) in announcements, in key building areas
  - **Messages for communication aids and services** (e.g., interpreters)

International Symbol of Accessibility

International TDD Symbol

Telephone Handset Amplification Symbol

What types of POLICIES AND PRACTICES NEED TO BE MODIFIED?

- Discriminatory policies such as prohibiting hearing assistance dogs
- Discriminatory eligibility criteria such as restricting access to goods and services unless necessary for the provision of goods and services

What is the best way to ensure COST-EFFECTIVE ADA COMPLIANCE?

- **Perform a facility accessibility audit** that includes identification of communication barriers
- **Determine auxiliary aids and services needs**
- **Develop a plan to remove barriers and acquire assistive devices**
- **Perform ongoing audit and maintenance of accessibility features**
- **Modify discriminatory policies, practices, and procedures**
- **Obtain technical assistance and consult** with rehabilitation professionals, disability organizations, consumers, federal agencies as appropriate

The BOTTOM LINE

- **Ask people about their needs, show respect and sensitivity, use what works (not necessarily what is most expensive), use your resources creatively and effectively.**

This document is available in the following formats: large print, audiotape, computer disk, braille, electronic bulletin board (202-514-6193).

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